

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ADP-00 RSR-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

H-02 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01

SS-15 USIA-12 IO-13 DPW-01 AID-20 OMB-01 /140 W
----- 014595

R 211046 Z JUN 73

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3522

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

AMCONSUL CAN THO

AMCONSUL DANANG

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 11155

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT VS

SUBJECT: REACTIONS IN SAIGON TO UPPER HOUSE ELECTION SLATES

1. REACTIONS IN SAIGON TO THE FOUR SLATES COMPETING IN THE UPPER HOUSE ELECTION HAS SO FAR BEEN MUTED. INDEPENDENT AND OPPOSITION POLITICIANS GENERALLY TAKE THE VIEW THAT THE RESULT (I. E., TWO OBVIOUS WINNERS AND TWO WEAK SLATES) IS NOT FAR DIFFERENT FROM WHAT THEY EXPECTED. PRO- THIEU POLITICIANS ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE COMPETITION WILL NOT BE GREAT THIS YEAR, BUT THEY DEFEND THE ELECTION AS GIVING A VALID CHOICE TO THE VOTERS. THE PUBLIC SEEMS BASICALLY INDIFFERENT, ALTHOUGH SOME POLITICALLY AWARE INDIVIDUALS RESIGNEDLY MOCK THE ELECTION AS A NON- CONTEST.

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THE PRO- ADMINISTRATION VIEW

2. IN A CONVERSATION WITH AN EMBASSY OFFICER JUNE 20, RD MINISTER NGUYEN VAN NGAI ARGUED THE ADMINISTRATION' S POSITION. HE REVEALED THAT LATE LAST WEEK THE PALACE HAD CALLED HIM BACK TO SAIGON FROM A DEMOCRACY PARTY MEETING IN VUNG TAU FOR THE PURPOSE OF CREATING NON- DP SLATES. HE APPROACHED SENATOR DANG VAN SUNG JUNE 16 IN AN ATTEMPT TO ACHIEVE THIS. NGAI' S ACCOUNT TO THE EMBASSY OFFICER OF THE SUBSEQUENT BARGAINING CLOSELY PARALLELED THE STORY IN SAIGON 10925, THE CHIEF DIFFERENCE BEING THAT NGAI BLAMED SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE LEADER TRAN QUOC BUU FOR THE EFFORT' S FAILURE IN DEMANDING TO SEE THIEU PERSONALLY ABOUT THE PROSPECTIVE SLATE. NGAI SUSPECTED THAT BUU INTENDED TO SOUND OUT THE PRESIDENT ON A DIFFERENT SLATE THAT BUU ALLEGEDLY WAS CONCOCTING. IN ANY CASE, BUU' S MEETING WITH THIEU COULD NOT BE ARRANGED, AND SO BUU BALKED. NGAI ADDED RUEFULLY THAT HE HAD ASSURED BOTH SUNG AND BUU THAT THE GVN WOULD " SUPPORT" THEIR SLATE. HE DID NOT ELABORATE ON THIS POINT.

3. ADMITTING THERE WERE TWO CLEARLY STRONGER AND TWO WEAKER SLATES, NGAI NEVERTHELESS ARGUED THAT THE WEAKER SLATES WOULD NOT AUTOMATICALLY LOSE. THE IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION NOW IS HOW HONESTLY THE ELECTION IS CONDUCTED.

4. NGAI' S MOST FORCEFUL POINT WAS THAT THE ABORTED SUNG- BUU EFFORT MUST BE LOOKED ON AS A FAILURE OF THE OLD- TIME POLITICIANS, IN WHOM HE FELT FOREIGN OBSERVERS PUT TOO MUCH CREDENCE. THESE OLD- TIMERS ARE NOT INCLINED TO COMPROMISE, HE DECLARED, AND THE GOVERNMENT IS LEARNING TO EXPECT LITTLE FROM THEM. HE SINGLED OUT BUU PARTICULARLY IN THIS REGARD.

INDEPENDENT AND OPPOSITION POLITICIANS

5. NOT SURPRISINGLY, A DIFFERENT VIEW EMERGES FROM CONVERSATIONS WITH POLITICIANS OUTSIDE THE GOVERNMENT . ACCORDING TO SENATOR LE CHAU LOC OF THE CATHOLIC- ORIENTED FREEDOM PARTY, HE AND HIS PARTY COLLEAGUES " WORKED ALL NIGHT" BETWEEN JUNE 15 AND 16 TO CREATE A SLATE ALLIED WITH THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE. THE EFFORT WAS REJECTED BY SDA LEADER BUU, WHO SAID HE HAD HEARD FROM PRIVATE CONTACTS THAT THE PALACE HAD ALREADY SENT ORDERS TO THE PROVINCE CHIEFS TO ELECT TWO DEMOCRACY PARTY SLATES AT ALL

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COSTS. THUS, BUU CONSIDERED COMPETITION AGAINST THE DP TO BE WASTED EFFORT.

6. OPPOSITION SENATOR PHAM VAN TAM LAST WEEK ISSUED A PUBLIC STATEMENT EXPLAINING WHY HE IS NOT RUNNING AGAIN. THE STATEMENT AMOUNTS TO AN INDICTMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RVN OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS. TAM' S POSITION AS A SPOKESMAN

FOR THE EXTREME OPPOSITION ORIENTED TOWARD BIG MINH IS CLEARLY REVEALED. HE STATED THAT THE PARIS ACCORD OF LAST JANUARY AND SUBSEQUENT NEGOTIATIONS HAVE INVALIDATED THE CONSTITUTION. MOREOVER, THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY HAS BECOME MERELY " AN ORNAMENT FOR A POWER - HUNGRY MAN". NOT WISHING TO BE A USELESS DECORATION OF THE REGIME, HE CHOSE NOT TO RUN.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES

7. THE REACTION OF THE SAIGON POPULATION TO THE FOUR SLATES, WHILE AS ALWAYS DIFFICULT TO JUDGE, APPEARS BASICALLY UNCONCERNED. THE PRESS HAS PUBLISHED THE LISTS OF CANDIDATES, BUT HAS COMMENTED ON THEM ONLY IN GUARDED TERMS. EMBASSY CONTACTS WHO FOLLOW POLITICAL EVENTS CLOSELY TEND TO DERIDE THE ELECTION IS A FOREGONE CONCLUSION, BUT THEIR ATTITUDE SHOWS AMUSEMENT OR RESIGNATION MORE THAN ANGER.

8. AN INDICATION OF THE REACTION IN NON- POLITICAL CIRCLES IS SUGGESTED BY COMMENTS OF CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP NGUYEN VAN BINH TO AN EMBASSY OFFICER ON JUNE 21. HE BELIEVED THE GENERAL PUBLIC DOES NOT CARE HOW MANY SLATES THERE ARE, BUT THOSE WHO DO CARE ABOUT SUCH DEVELOPMENTS WILL " NOT ACCEPT" THE PRESENT RESULT. BINH WAS NOT SURPRISED THAT THE CATHOLIC- ORIENTED FREEDOM PARTY HAD NO SLATE, FOR HE REGARDED THAT PARTY AS EXTREMELY WEAK. HE WAS MORE SURPRISED THAT THE SDA DID NOT COME UP WITH A LIST, EITHER ON ITS OWN OR AS LEADER OF A NON- DP COALITION. WHITEHOUSE

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a

*** Current Classification *** CONFIDENTIAL

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: VS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 21 JUN 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: garlanwa
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973SAIGON11155
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: RR
Errors: n/a
Film Number: n/a
From: SAIGON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730625/aaaajimb.tel
Line Count: 147
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: garlanwa
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 13 SEP 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <13-Sep-2001 by smithrj>; APPROVED <23-Nov-2001 by garlanwa>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> wfs 980217
Subject: REACTIONS IN SAIGON TO UPPER HOUSE ELECTION SLATES
TAGS: PINT, VS
To: AMCONSUL BIEN HOA
BANGKOK
BUDAPEST
CAN THO
DANANG
EA
JAKARTA

MANILA
SECSTATE WASHDC

Type: TE

Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005